

This Week In Congress

December 6, 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I did not send out a newsletter last week due to the Thanksgiving holiday, so this week's newsletter covers the past two weeks. I hope you find it useful.

Studying Soybean Rust

During the holiday week, I spent time in Louisiana studying the discovery of soybean rust in two plots associated with a Louisiana State University research farm. On November 10, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal Plant Health Inspection Service made the announcement of the rust discovery. The trip allowed me to observe this disease and its effects on soybeans and talk with experts about steps that can be taken to protect U.S. soybean production.

Soybean rust is a fungus. The good news is that the damage to this year's soybean crop will be minimal because nearly all of the nation's beans have been harvested. The bad news is that, since the initial discovery on November 7, soybean rust has been detected in seven additional states-Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri and South Carolina.

Upon my return to Kansas, I began discussions with Dennis Hupe of the Kansas Soybean Association and scientists at Kansas State University Research and Extension on ways to protect or deal with soybean rust should it spread to Kansas. I will continue to monitor the situation and will work with the USDA and other state and local experts to combat the spread of soybean rust and ensure the future of this important commodity.

President Taps Nebraska Governor to Lead USDA

On Thursday, President Bush announced that he has selected Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns to serve as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). I look forward to working with Governor Johanns and welcome him to the job. As our neighbor to the north and someone who grew up on a dairy farm, Johanns has a good understanding of production agriculture and will bring a common sense, Midwest approach to his leadership at the USDA. There are many challenges facing our agriculture community, including keeping our food supply safe and ensuring that American commodities have a level playing field on the international stage. I believe that Governor Johanns understands these challenges, and I will work with him to address them.

Governor Johanns will bring a unique understanding of the legislative process from his time as Governor of Nebraska, which will be critical as we begin work on the new farm bill. I will work with Johanns to ensure that the voices of our farmers are heard and that they remain our focus throughout this process.

Governor Johanns' nomination now goes to the U.S. Senate, where they will hold confirmation hearings.

Recognizing the Otis Community

On Thursday, I had the opportunity to recognize the selfless efforts of the Otis Emergency Medical Service (EMS) volunteers in Rush County with the "Building Better Communities" award. I presented this recognition in response to the Otis community's efforts to ensure that their EMS service continues.

Otis was facing the possibility of losing their EMS service due to a lack of emergency medical

technicians (EMT). Currently, the response time for a medical call is five to eight minutes; without local service, the response time would be over 20 minutes, with the nearest ambulance 15 miles away. Facing this outcome, six individuals stepped forward and agreed to take EMT training courses and volunteer their time to keep their EMS service running. In addition, two former volunteers agreed to return to the EMS, and two new volunteers, a registered nurse and an EMT, have made themselves available to go on ambulance runs when needed.

The "Building Better Communities" award was established as a way to recognize and share the good things that are happening in the First Congressional District of Kansas. Beyond providing recognition, this program will provide examples of how creative thinking and teamwork make a positive difference in rural America.

To recognize the community's efforts, I submitted comments into the Congressional Record. To read the full text of this speech, visit:

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/sp111804OtisSpeech.html

Visiting Kansas Communities

Russell

On Saturday, November 27, I joined residents of Russell for the annual Christmas Fest. This was an excellent opportunity to see many folks from Russell and join in their parade, which helped usher in the holiday season.

Liberal

On Monday, November 29, I traveled to Liberal to speak with the Liberal Lions Club and visit the Plains Cotton Co-Op Association's (PCCA) cotton warehouse. While at the Lions Club meeting, I joined 30 club members for lunch and provided a Congressional update and answered questions. After Lions Club, I joined Jack Taylor, Executive Director of the Liberal Chamber of Commerce, and Dick Cooper, PCCA's Director for Business Development for Kansas and Northern Oklahoma, to tour the cotton warehouse. Cotton is one of Kansas' fastest growing commodities, and Liberal is poised to take full advantage of this new crop.

Garden City

On Tuesday afternoon, I toured two Garden City area nursing homes, joining Michael McCormick, Director of the Garden Valley Retirement Center, and Gilbert Cruz, Director for the Homestead Retirement Center, for a tour and discussion at their respective facilities. The visits allowed me to meet with administrators, care givers and residents about the challenges that they are facing and what can be done on a federal level to assist with elderly care.

On Wednesday, I joined producers from across Kansas for the annual Kansas Commodity Classic. This event is held in a different town each year, allowing producers to discuss various issues facing the agriculture community. I spoke to the group about these issues and what is being done on a federal level to address them. Among the issues are the short line railroad assistance package that Congress passed and how it will positively affect the agriculture industry, the livestock reinvestment program that will allow ranchers who have been hit hard by drought conditions to rebuild their herds by deferring capital gains taxes, and how I was able to work with Congressional leadership to pass much-needed disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers who have suffered multiple years of drought. Other issues we discussed were dealing with pesticides, irrigation issues and a legislative outlook for the state and federal level. This direct interaction with Kansas farmers is especially important as we begin the initial steps for the new farm bill.

Dodge City

On Wednesday afternoon, I traveled to Dodge City to join Russell Cross, Senior Vice-President for Food Safety at the National Beef Plant, for a tour. This allowed me to see meat processing and preparation for sale and the steps that they have taken to protect against BSE. The plant processes 5,400 head of cattle per day.

Wichita

On Thursday, I joined the Kansas Livestock Association for their annual convention. This year it was held in Wichita, where they celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the hamburger. During a hamburger luncheon, I discussed many of the issues facing the beef industry, including BSE and exporting beef to Japan. insert text here}

Very truly yours,

Jerry

